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COLOMBIA

W. WINSTON THOMAS

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THE BOARD OF FOREIGN MISSIONS
OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
156 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y.



Barranquilla



COLOMBIA

W. WINSTON THOMAS

I. THE SPANISH CONQUEST

About forty years after Columbus made his first trip west, there sailed from Spain a fearless and daring soldier of fortune named Gonzalo Jimenez de Quesada. He had heard the tales of El Dorado (The Gilded Man) and he was determined to find him. For weeks he sailed across the stormy Atlantic until at last he arrived at the northern coast of South America. On he sailed past the snow-capped peaks of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta Mountains, and presently he entered the hill-surrounded harbor of Santa Marta which is now recognized as the oldest city in South America and the port from which Colombia ships several million bunches of bananas to North America and Europe each year.

Some 670 of Quesada's men disembarked at Santa Marta with their captain while the other 200 sailed on to the mouth of the

mighty, muddy Magdalena River. The two groups planned to meet in the interior of the country far to the south.

The Quest for Gold

Little did Jimenez de Quesada or his men stop to consider the dangers which lay in the path. The lure of gold was greater than the threat of hostile Indians, or the perils of jungle fevers. Nor did they hesitate at the thought of the black panther which attacks men from the trees, the deadly coral snakes of the underbrush, or the giant alligators which inhabited the swamps through which they would have to wade.

Cutting their way through the jungle the Spaniards often were able to march less than two miles a day. But day after day and week after week they pushed steadily to the south. Sometimes they took food from the Indians. At other times they killed wild pigs, deer, or huge tapirs for food. Occasionally they fished in the rivers which they had to cross. But the shortage of food, the jungle fevers, and the poison arrows of hostile Indians rapidly reduced the number of men who followed the intrepid Captain.

After eight months of travel toward the south, the river, along whose banks the smaller group was marching, became narrower and mountains appeared on both sides. Not many days afterward, the two groups, now greatly reduced in number, joined their forces at a point on the Magdalena River now called Barranca Bermeja (Red Banks) which is about 400 miles from the mouth of the river. Today the Standard Oil Company has huge refineries at Barranca Bermeja. Nearby in the jungle is one of the richest oil deposits in all South America. But Quesada was looking for yellow gold, not for "black gold," as the rich Colombian oil is called. So he passed by the rich, liquid "gold" which has brought so many North Americans to the jungles of Colombia, and, turning his back on the river and the steaming jungle, the Captain led his muttering men into the mountains toward the rising sun.

Quesada was sure that he was nearing his goal, for his scouts had captured a dugout canoe on the River Opon. The Indians in the canoe had a quantity of salt with them,—salt which did not come from the ocean but from a mine. When questioned about the salt, the Indians pointed to the east. And they pointed in the same direction when shown some of the precious yellow metal which Quesada sought.

The trails through the Andes Mountains were narrow and hard to follow. But the air became cooler and the vegetation was no longer that of the tropical jungle. And there were more and more signs of Indian civilization.

As the weeks passed the going was slower. The trails were steeper and it was more difficult for the men to breathe. Now and then the clouds would settle around them and the damp cold would penetrate their tattered clothing and chill them to the bone.

After almost three months of travel through the mountains the Spaniards approached a great cliff which was clearly seen now and then but was often hidden in the clouds. The trail which they followed took them around one side of the majestic, rocky bulwark and led them through a cold, foggy pass in the mountains.

Of the original 870 men who had set out with Quesada, only 166 lived to march through that pass and down onto the fifty-mile-wide tableland almost two miles above the sea.

Looking down on the broad *savannah* they saw that the fields were cultivated and that there were many Indian villages. Friendly Indians guided them to the far side of the flat valley to the village in which lived Bagata, chief of all the Chibcha Indians of whom it is said that there were several millions.

Chief Bagata thought that the Spaniards were gods and he received them as such. But he soon found out to his dismay that they had not come as gods to help him and his people, but as conquerors to dominate and rob them!



An outdoor class at the Girls' School, Barranquilla

Chibcha Indians did not have as much gold as the Spaniards had expected. Nor were they able to recover much gold from Lake Guatativa into which El Dorado, the Indian painted with gold, threw golden offerings each year to the gods. And so, it is said, the Spaniards forced Chief Bagata to profess the Catholic religion, after which they baptised him and then, before he had time to sin, they killed him. Thus the priests had the satisfaction of believing that Chief Bagata had gone directly to heaven, while the soldiers were able to divide his gold among them.

On the site where Chief Bagata was baptised and put to death, Jimenez de Quesada founded a settlement in the year 1538. He built a little church called "*El Humilladero*" (Shrine of the Humble) surrounded by twelve thatch-roofed huts, one for each of the Apostles. And, according to one story, from the gold crown of Bagata he made a gold cross for the altar of the church. For the name of the town he chose *Santa Fe* (Holy Faith), but later changed it to *La Santa Fe de Bagata* in memory of the baptism of the Indian chief!

After the Conquest

During the first two-and-a-half centuries of its existence there was little to disturb the peace of this growing town. Early in 1571 it became one of the important seats of higher learning in the New World. As the years passed the *Santa Fe* was dropped from the name of the town and the *Bagata* was changed to Bogota.

The gold cross, said to have been made from Bagata's crown, was set over the huge doors of the new Cathedral where it may be seen today.

But Spain ruled the colonies with an iron hand. She imposed her will oppressively, zealously collected the taxes, and monopolized the commerce. Finally, the citizens of Bogota decided that they could not stand the oppression of Spain any longer, and on July 20, 1810 they deposed the viceroy, thus beginning the War of Independence. For nine years the colonists fought bitterly against Spain under the leadership of the great Simon Bolivar until on August 7, 1819 the power of Spain was at last broken. And because the Roman Catholic Church in the New World had sided with the Mother Country against the colonies, she too lost much of her power and influence for a time.

II. THE BEGINNINGS OF THE COLOMBIA MISSION

Among the members of the British Legion which had fought with Bolivar there was a valiant Scotchman, Colonel James Fraser. As Col. Fraser went from one part of the country to another with the armies, he was appalled at the condition of the common people. For the most part they lived in crude, mud or bamboo shacks, none of them could read or write, their children were unclothed and underfed, and the unmarried mothers far outnumbered the married.

When confronted with this ignorance, abject poverty, and open

immorality, the Catholic Church boasted that the Colombian people were the most faithful of all to the Church and that it was not the task of the Church to take any interest in "temporal" matters.

Thoroughly disgusted, Col. Fraser talked the problem over with some of the liberal Colombians. They decided that the country needed a new and dynamic presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Since Fraser was a Scotchman he appealed first to the Presbyterian Church of Scotland but did not receive a favorable reply. He then wrote to The Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. and asked that someone be sent to Colombia.

The First Missionaries

Thus it came about that in 1856 there sailed from New York the Reverend Henry B. Pratt, the first Presbyterian missionary to South America.

It is not known just how long it took this first missionary to travel the 2,000 miles from New York to Barranquilla. But he must have been surprised, as most new missionaries to Colombia are, when he discovered that he was still north of the Isthmus of Panama when he landed on the shores of South America.

Embarking at once in one of the new, little, river steamers, Mr. Pratt began his long journey toward Bogota, the capital of Colombia. For weeks the small, flat-bottomed boat pushed its way up the wide, muddy Magdalena River. Every day it was necessary to stop and tie up at the bank while the crew went into the jungle to cut wood to fire the boilers. The river became narrower and the progress slower until at last the little steamboat arrived at Puerto Lievano. As the crew flies they had come about 500 miles but actually they had traveled much farther.

The passengers bound for Bogota found burro trains waiting for them at the river's edge. For three long weeks the small beasts

of burden patiently followed the trails through the rolling mountains until at last they reached the foggy, wind-swept pass and came out upon the *savannahs* of Bogota, 8,600 feet above the sea.

Some parts of Bogota have not changed much since 1856. One can still walk the old cobblestone streets past the same thick-walled, mud-brick houses with their "inscrutable doors" and their barred windows. It was a cold, grey, sad city in which women, dressed completely in black, came out of the thick doors of a morning, at the sound of the tolling bells, to attend mass in one of the innumerable old churches.

The government did not hinder Mr. Pratt's efforts to start an Evangelical church, but the Roman Catholic Church issued protests and threats from the very first.

After two years had passed, the Rev. and Mrs. Samuel M. Sharp arrived in Bogota to help in the work. Not long after their arrival Mr. Pratt returned to the United States where for over

A Colombian evangelist travels with the Gospel Bus



fifty years he continued by his pen to aid the work among the Spanish-speaking people, making the first modern translation of the Bible into Spanish.

And Mr. Sharp was the first to make the supreme sacrifice for the sake of bringing the gospel to Colombia, for in 1860, while on a trip to the Magdalena River to meet the Rev. and Mrs. William McLaren, he contracted fever and died.

The McLarens succeeded in organizing a Presbyterian church in Bogota in 1861, the first in all of South America. But all of the members of this church were from the foreign colony, and until 1885 no Colombian became a member of the church although many attended.

The first Presbyterian missionaries to spend more than three years in Bogota, the first to have any notable success, and the first to hold regular services in a building dedicated to that purpose were the Rev. and Mrs. Thomas Wallace.

When Thomas Wallace left New York with his young bride, he probably did not realize that he would arrive in the little-known land to the south at such a dangerous but opportune time. When they reached Barranquilla early in 1862, they heard rumors of a revolution which had broken out in the interior of the country. It seemed that the Liberals were again desperately trying to take over the government of Colombia from the Conservatives who were so dominated by the Roman Church.

Disregarding whatever warnings they may have received, the Wallaces embarked as passengers on one of the flat-bottomed river steamers. For several tranquil days the boat steamed slowly up the Magdalena River. Then very suddenly one morning, the false sense of peace and security in which all of the travelers had lived, was rudely interrupted. As the boat rounded a bend in the river, the passengers heard a great shout go up. "¡Aquí viene! Ya vamos!" (Here it comes! Now we go!) And to

their dismay they saw that the right bank of the river was lined with soldiers who pointed eagerly toward the boat.

“Who are they, and what will they do with us?” inquired the new missionary, anxiously.

“They appear to be the soldiers of the ex-president Mosquera,” replied a cultured Colombian in good English. “He has joined the Liberals and is leading an army against the Conservatives who are in control of the government. They will probably take our boat but I do not believe that they will harm us in any way.”

Soon the boat pulled up to the shore and was made fast to the bank. The soldiers did not rush on board as many had feared. Instead, their leader, a man of obviously strong character, stepped forward and crossed the plank which had been thrown ashore. In an awed whisper the word passed from lip to ear, “General Mosquera!”

The General went directly to the Captain and was seen to be in earnest conversation with him. After a moment they both turned and the Captain announced that all passengers had to go ashore with their baggage.

When this news was understood by Mr. Wallace, he went forward to inquire what was to happen to them. General Tomas Mosquera, himself, answered him in English! He assured Mr. Wallace that they would be cared for and that the boat would return for them after a few days. He then commented on the fact that the given name of both himself and Mr. Wallace was Thomas. And when he learned that Thomas Wallace was a Protestant missionary he seemed to be not only interested but very much pleased. He concluded the conversation with “A sus ordenes” (at your orders). By the tone of his voice the Wallaces knew that in General Mosquera they had found a real friend and a staunch supporter.



First and second grades in the Mission school — Bogota

During the next few days the Wallaces learned by experience how the small town Colombians lived. Since they were the first North Americans who had ever stopped at the village, they were treated with considerable respect but at the same time they were objects of an overwhelming and unembarrassed curiosity.

The wealthiest man in town, a ranch owner, offered them hospitality. They accepted through their English-speaking friend who was also invited to be the guest of the rancher. On horseback they rode through the muddy streets lined with thatch-roofed, mud houses, then through a grove of coconut palms, and up to a large, square, one-story house constructed of mud brick covered with whitewashed plaster. Here Senor Vargas, their host, entertained them as honored guests.

Morning found them quite rested after their first night in hammocks. They rode over the ranch on horseback, Mrs. Wallace

riding side-saddle as the women do even today in the country districts of Colombia.

As they crossed the plains dotted with palms, they marveled at the exotic tropical plants and flowers, the many tiny birds darting here and there, and blue and green lizards which scampered from their path, but they shuddered at the wicked-looking alligators which slid into the swamps which they skirted. The snakes about which they had been warned before leaving the United States were far fewer in number than they had expected.

And thus the days passed until one morning a boat whistle told them that it was time to leave this tropical garden and continue their trip to Bogota.

But as the boat moved off into the river, Martha and Thomas Wallace carried with them not only the memory of the friendly hospitality, the lovely flowers, and the tropical birds; they also had the memory of life as it was (and still is) lived in a Colombian village. It would be impossible for them to forget the squalid mud huts, the unmarried mothers, the hundreds of naked children, the lack of the first elementals of sanitation, the fact that there was no doctor, no teacher or school, no priest, pastor, or church within a hundred miles of that village.

When Mr. Wallace mentioned some of these living conditions to a fellow traveler, the Colombian replied with a typical shrug of the shoulders, "Yes, the way they live seems terrible to us but they don't know any better. And there is no use trying to do anything about it because they don't want to be any different."

The missionary did not reply, but, as he gazed for the last time at the squalid village, his jaw hardened and his eyes took on a grim, determined look. Something *would* be done about such ignorance, poverty, and sin. *He* would see to that.

Bogota

Not long after the Wallaces arrived in Bogota, General Tomas

Mosquera defeated the Conservative forces and took control of the government of Colombia. Thomas Wallace had also been struggling against those same forces and he also had gained a victory. In 1886 he had bought for \$8,000 part of an old building which had once been used by the Inquisition, and he had made it into a chapel.

General Mosquera was not a Protestant. However, on the day of dedication of the new chapel, the General and all his government officials were present. He wanted to show by personal example that he honored the Constitution which decreed freedom of worship. Passing quietly into the small sanctuary, the General and his officials took seats. Army officers stood at the back of the room, while soldiers and friends crowded the street outside the doors.

In 1875 when the Board transferred the Rev. and Mrs. Thomas Wallace to Mexico, they left behind them in Bogota a growing congregation in the Presbyterian Church and a small girls' school. With them went their nine-year-old son, William, who, following in his father's footsteps, served as a missionary in Mexico until he retired a few years ago, still full of enthusiasm and energy despite his seventy years of age.

Other men and women, of whom little is known, came to Colombia, worked for a few years in the church or school, and returned home.

Barranquilla

In the 1880's the Colombia Mission appealed to the Board for a teacher to start a boys' school. In 1889 there sailed from New York a Prof. W. W. Finlay, and, on the same boat with him, a Miss Addie C. Ramsay whose sister had come out in 1880 and had married the Rev. Thomas Candor who arrived in 1882.

During the long trip to Barranquilla the two young mission-

aries were often together, and by the time they had reached Colombia they had fallen in love. They decided to be married in the church in Bogota.

For several days they waited in Barranquilla for passage on a river steamer. But before the boat sailed, Miss Ramsay came down with a tropical fever. Professor Finlay did not want to go on without her, but, knowing that he was badly needed in Bogota, and realizing that his bride-to-be would be well cared for by her sister and brother-in-law who had opened work in Barranquilla the year before, he set off for Bogota.

Only a few hours after leaving Barranquilla, the young professor also developed a fever which became worse as the days passed. Tossing on his hard bed in the little cabin, his parched lips often called for Addie, while she too called for him as her fever mounted.

The country home of a Christian family



A few days later Addie Ramsay was buried in the hard clay of a hot Barranquilla cemetery, while he was laid to rest under a giant tree on the west bank of the Magdalena River. Often in the years that have passed, older missionaries have told the story of young Professor Finlay and Miss Addie Ramsay. And as the missionaries have traveled up and down the river and have passed the giant tree which marks the burying place of Professor Finlay, they have paid silent tribute to these who died before they had even begun the work which they longed to do.

Many and varied are the stories of how various men and women happened to be called to preach or teach in Colombia. But the most interesting and the strangest of all is the story told by the Rev. Alexander M. Allan. As a young man he left his native Scotland to seek his fortune in New Zealand. But he liked the sea so well that he became a sailor and was often away from his new home for months at a time. On one occasion he had as shipmates some of the descendants of First Mate Christian who led the mutiny on the "Bounty."

But a storm which wrecked the boat on which the young Scotchman was sailing, changed the course of his life. The ship went to pieces on the coast of Brazil. For days the survivors pushed eastward along the shore, eating sea food and wild fruits. Then they came to villages. The filth, the disease, the ignorance, and the misery of those villages caused the religious young Scotchman to pray, "O God, if thou wilt help me to get back to New Zealand, I will return as a missionary to these forsaken people."

He kept his word and came to New York to offer himself to the Presbyterian Board. He was accepted and was assigned to Barranquilla where the Rev. and Mrs. Walter S. Lee were just completing the first ten of their forty years of devoted service to Colombia. After Mr. Allan was settled in Barranquilla he

sent to New Zealand for Mrs. Allan who had married him two weeks before he sailed for New York. Her father had insisted that she remain in New Zealand until her young husband had obtained a definite appointment to a mission field. For over thirty years Mr. and Mrs. Allan have preached the gospel of Christ in Colombia.

But even more remarkable than the story of how Mr. Allan became a missionary, is the story of the changes that have taken place in Colombia since he first came to the field.

Dr. Speer's Visit

Just before Mr. Allan's arrival in Barranquilla in 1910, Dr. Robert E. Speer visited Colombia and wrote a description of the country and the mission work. After describing the unbelievably rich natural resources of the country, he says, "And yet this rich country is one of the most backward and decrepit nations in the world. . . . In Colombia we saw more poverty and suffering than anywhere else in South America."*

Dr. Speer goes on to tell how on one afternoon in the city of Honda more beggars came to him than he had seen in all the rest of his trip through South America. He tells of important highways falling in ruin, of government mail carried on pack mules because of the uncertainty of the railroad, of the failure on the part of the great masses of the population to get married, and of the terribly inferior and inadequate schools.

Of the government university, "the best school in Bogota" he says, "It was the most dirty, forlorn, run-down-at-the-heels, unorganized school I have ever seen."

"But," continues Dr. Speer, "the cause of Colombia's special backwardness is not the character of the great mass of the people. They are willing, industrious, cordial people. We met no people in South America more hearty and amiable.

*Robert E. Speer, *Missions in South America*, Chap. II, part 3.



Christian students — Bogota

One never wants for help. In some of the South American lands there is a great deal of the dourishness of the Indian. There is much Indian blood in the Colombian, but it is a good-natured, friendly blood. On the highways, in the markets, in the homes, one met only with warm-hearted expressive good will.

“The cause of Colombia’s special backwardness is twofold. First, it is the character of the governing class. . . . Politics to them means holding office and drawing a salary and talking of the nation and its honor, it does not mean the development of its resources, the improvement of its communications, the education of its children, the progress of its industries. . . .

“The other great cause of special backwardness of Colombia is the dominance of the Roman Catholic Church, which

holds the land in a grasp which she has been obliged to release in the other South American countries. . . . The Roman Church in Colombia has been a reactionary and obscurantist influence for centuries. . . . The people have not been taught. . . . In a word, the fact is, that one of the best countries and peoples in South America, and one docile to the Church and most under its control, is the most backward and destitute and pitiful.”

But the responsibility for the backwardness of the country could not be laid entirely upon the politicians and the Roman Church. For over fifty years Colombia, as a mission field, had been left entirely to the Presbyterian Church. But our Church had never fully accepted the challenge. Often there had been but three or four Presbyterian missionaries in the whole country. And at the time of Dr. Speer’s visit there were but eight Presbyterian missionaries to preach the gospel to four million people scattered over a territory more than twice the size of France or ten times the size of Pennsylvania.

After fifty years of work, the Presbyterians had but three churches with a total of 230 members, four elementary schools (two for boys and two for girls) with a total enrollment of but 225 pupils. There were no secondary schools, no Colombian pastors, and only eight Colombian teachers and lay workers!

A challenge was flung to the Presbyterian Church by Dr. Speer. “The Gospel is in our hands for them (the Colombians),” he wrote, “and if we abandon them who will give it to them? The Roman Catholic Church has been with them for three centuries and it has not given it to them. Who will, if we do not?”

The Presbyterian Church was stirred and as the result the number of missionaries was increased from eight to thirty-two, while the missionaries themselves, inspired by Dr. Speer’s visit, redoubled their efforts to evangelize Colombia.



An Indian visits the city



Vendors sell



s and cheese



The gardener carries his mower and helper with him

The Years of Struggle

Thrilling are the stories of these last thirty years of struggle against powerful opposition, against apathy, against ignorance and sin.

A few years ago the Rev. C. A. Douglass, while on an evangelistic trip, entered the small town of Ituango to sell some Bibles and to talk about the Good News of Jesus Christ. About noon a traveling merchant came to him and arranged to buy all of his stock of Bibles. Soon afterward a boy came running up, crying, "They are burning the Bibles!" Hurrying to the *Plaza*, Mr. Douglass found the local priest directing the burning of the Bibles which were being torn apart and thrown onto a pile of burning straw. Two policemen watched to see that not a leaf escaped the fire. They seemed to be quite pleased when Mr. Douglass photographed their activity.*

Many colporteurs have been seized and thrown into jail for selling Bibles in some of the smaller towns of Colombia, several have been beaten, and at least one was killed. But in recent years when the governors of the Departments have been appointed by Liberal presidents, it has been possible, by appealing to the governor, to obtain the release of Evangelicals who have been jailed.

In one such case the priest insisted that the Concordat with the Vatican took precedence over the Constitution and the mayor agreed to put the colporteur in jail in spite of a letter from the governor which the colporteur had with him. But the liberal citizens took up the case and had the man released. They also signed a statement as to what had occurred. Upon reaching Medellin the colporteur presented the statement to the governor. The result was that the governor demanded the resignation of the mayor and immediately sent a new one to take his place. (In Colombia the

*Wheeler and Browning, *Modern Missions of the Spanish Main*, page 256.



At a young people's conference near Medellin

President appoints the governors and they in turn appoint the mayors.)

In recent years the Liberal government has encouraged book fairs throughout the country. And it is now possible for the British and Foreign Bible Society in the interior, and the American Bible Society on the coast to have tables at these fairs without being afraid that they might be run out of town. These two Bible Societies sell literally tons of Bibles in Colombia every year.

As in other Roman Catholic countries, the Catholic Church in Colombia has insisted that it alone had the authority to perform the marriage ceremony. For this service it has always charged a fee which was more than the poorer people could pay, with the result that in some sections of the country more than half of the children have unmarried parents.

The Liberals in recent years have backed the Evangelicals in their insistence upon their right to have a civil marriage which could be followed by a religious ceremony if the couple so de-

sired. This type of marriage was finally sanctioned by Congress but, after that, came the struggle to force its recognition in all parts of the country. The Roman Church fiercely combated the new type of marriage although it did not interfere with the right of all who wished to be married only by the Catholic Church instead of having a civil ceremony, both types of marriage being legal. Often a real battle had to be fought in the local courts before a Presbyterian couple could be married outside of the Catholic Church.

In the following words Dr. Webster E. Browning tells of the final victory of the Presbyterian Church in the matter of the legality of marriage outside of the Roman Church:

“The Roman Church finally selected one such couple and decided to make it a test case, evidently counting on sufficient influence to carry its point. The marriage was declared null and void, and the baby of illegitimate birth. In return, a petition was prepared and addressed to the national congress, signed by a large number of influential citizens, among them an ex-president of the republic, asking that the law be defined and a decision given as to the marriages already performed by judges. This petition had the desired effect, since congress, in view of the political and social standing of the signers, was obliged to give the only legal interpretation possible, and declared the complete legality of the marriages according to law.”*

Another victory concerns education. In 1937 there was a nation-wide strike of secondary school students against existing requirements for entrance into the National University. The students asked that the entrance examinations and the year of preparatory work be done away with. The Liberals had been in power since 1930 and they were very anxious to improve the

*Wheeler and Browning, *Modern Missions of the Spanish Main*, page 143.

higher education in Colombia in every way possible. After listening to the students' demands, the Minister of Education agreed to inspect the secondary schools and to permit graduates of the approved school to enter the National University without examination.

Again it appeared that a battle would have to be fought, this time in order to gain recognition for the Presbyterian schools. The graduates of the large Presbyterian schools had always stood high in their classes at the National University and in the colleges and universities in the United States, but the inspectors made excuses and refused to approve the schools!

It so happened that at the time the president of the National University was Dr. Nieto Caballero, an internationally known educator, who had attended the Presbyterian Boys' School of Bogota for a time. Mr. Murray Wise, then director of the school which Dr. Caballero had attended, visited him and talked the problem over with him. He also paid many visits to the offices of the Ministry of Education. As the result the inspectors spent over a week in the school during 1938 and, after coming to know the Presbyterian work first hand, they gave the school a high rating and fully approved it.

At about the same time another battle was being fought against the age-old Spanish custom of completely separating the sexes from early childhood until marriage. When a missionary first suggested having a mixed young people's society in a Presbyterian church, the officers of the church were horrified. But the younger missionaries continued to suggest it until the older people finally consented in 1936 to give the radical plan a trial. Imagine their surprise when the society grew and prospered and the young people behaved in a perfectly proper manner.

The next suggestion was a summer conference for young people and again the older generation was aghast. But the conference was held and was a great success. Several of the Pres-

byterian young people's societies of Colombia now have their annual conferences in mission cottages in the mountains or on the seashore. At the last conference in December, 1941, twelve young women and thirteen young men spent six days with their counselors at Santa Ana in the Andes Mountains. Their intelligence, enthusiasm, and consecration makes the future of the Presbyterian Church in Colombia look brighter than it has for years.

And finally came the most daring innovation of all, coeducation! When the Presbyterian schools of Bogota opened in February of 1941, ten girls from the Girls' School enrolled in the eleventh and twelfth grades and in the commercial departments of the Boys' School. (The Girls' School does not go beyond the tenth grade.) Much to the surprise of the skeptics, the plan succeeded beyond all expectations. The discipline was better in the mixed classes, and no "boy-girl" problems developed! Which proves that the Latin young people are fundamentally just as capable of being Christian in their actions toward each other as are the Nordic young people!

A Colombian Christian teaches handicrafts



III. THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

During the thirty years that have passed since Dr. Speer's visit, the Presbyterian work in Colombia has grown in an almost miraculous manner. Where there were but three Presbyterian churches in all Colombia in 1910, there are seventeen organized churches today. In seventy other centers evangelistic work is being carried on. Three presbyteries and a synod have been organized which means that the Nationals are taking over more and more of the leadership of the Presbyterian Church in Colombia.

The number of Presbyterian schools has increased from four small primary schools thirty years ago to thirty-two elementary schools and four large secondary schools in 1941. Today there are 2,000 pupils in Presbyterian schools, almost ten times as many as there were in 1910.

When Mr. Allan arrived in Barranquilla thirty years ago there were no ordained Colombian pastors, today there are eight. Almost pentecostal growth in some parts of the Colombia Mission has increased the number of church members from 230 in 1910 to over 3,000 baptised communicant members in 1941.

Evidences of Progress

But as interesting and revealing as the statistics are, they do not tell the whole story, and only a visit to Colombia will reveal the really great progress that has been made both in the Presbyterian work and in the social and economic life of our nearest South American neighbor.

Barranquilla, the principal seaport of Colombia, is just 2065 miles straight south of New York City, and it may be reached by boat in four delightful days of travel through the Atlantic Ocean and the deep blue Caribbean Sea. The ocean boats formerly docked at the mile-long pier at Puerto Colombia, about ten miles

from the city of Barranquilla, but the mouth of the Magdalena River has at last been deepened making it possible for the boats to dock within ten minutes by auto from the center of the city.

Half a mile from the boat dock, the Pan-American Airways has a modern airport on the banks of the river. Three times a week the giant, thirty-to-forty-passenger Clippers roar down out of the northern sky to land on the river, having left Miami, Florida, about eight hours before. Smaller flying boats come in regularly from Panama which is about 400 miles to the *southwest* of Barranquilla.

Visitors to Barranquilla are impressed by the contrasts in this growing city of 150,000 population. There is a modern water purification plant, automatic telephones, and a huge, up-to-date hotel on the hill overlooking the business section of the city. But there are still plenty of mud houses with thatched roofs, donkeys still trot patiently up and down the hot streets, and in many parts of the city small boys run about wearing not a single stitch of clothing.

Because of the heat, which is particularly trying during the rainy season, men all wear light, pure white suits which are generally washed, heavily starched, and ironed every three or four days. Women wear white clothes unless in mourning when they wear all black.

Besides the innumerable Catholic churches, there are three Presbyterian churches and one Seventh Day Adventist church in Barranquilla. There is also a Presbyterian school for boys with about 500 students and one for girls with over 300 pupils. Until three years ago the students paid enough tuition to make these large schools entirely self-supporting but the new social legislation, new laws concerning educational standards, and new hygiene requirements make it impossible to maintain the school on what the students pay.



The sand table is an attraction

Strong Colombian Christians

In Barranquilla the outstanding Colombian leader is the Rev. Senor Manuel Escorcia, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church and Director of the Boys' School. He is a graduate of The College of Wooster, Wooster, Ohio, and was a delegate to the Madras Conference held in India in 1938.

The Rev. Julio Hernandez, whose oldest son is a student in Purdue University, Indiana, is a successful contractor and part-time pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church. The Third Pres-

byterian Church is still under the guidance of a missionary although Senor May, a Colombian, often takes the pulpit.

It is interesting to note that these three Colombian leaders in Barranquilla represent the three predominant racial groups of Colombia: Spanish, Indian, and Negro. (Altogether there are nearly ten million people living in Colombia of whom 20 per cent are white, 7 per cent are Indian, 5 per cent are Negro, and 68 per cent are mixed. But in each of the three churches there may be found leaders from each of these racial groups, there being almost no race prejudice in Colombia.)

Areas of Opportunity

Most of the people of Colombia live in the mountain valleys. Beginning in the southwest corner of the country, near the Pacific coast, the three great mountain ranges spread out toward the north like a fan or like the veins of a leaf. Between the three ranges of mountains flow the Cauca and the Magdalena rivers, the former joining the latter about 200 miles from its mouth. Very few people live in the southeastern third of Colombia since in that part of the country begin the vast plains and jungles which continue across Brazil to the Atlantic Ocean. Some of the rivers which drain that part of Colombia empty into the mighty Amazon River.

Because of the mountainous nature of the inhabited part of Colombia, travel is very difficult except by plane, although the river travel, the railroads, and the automobile roads are being steadily improved. A German company (taken over by the Colombian Government in 1940) came to Colombia in 1919 and built one of the most efficient airlines in America. Today the twenty-passenger Douglass planes piloted by North Americans make the trip of 500 miles from Barranquilla to Bogota in about two-and-a-half hours. By boat and train the trip still takes one week.

A three-day trip up the Magdalena River by boat and a few hours to the east by train brings the traveler to Bucaramanga where the national "Olympics" were held in December, 1941. Located about 300 miles south of Barranquilla at an altitude of 3,340 feet, this city has a population of some 30,000. It is surrounded by rolling mountains on the slopes of which are large coffee plantations which produce high grade coffee for export.

In Bucaramanga an unordained Colombian pastor is serving his internship under the guidance of the resident missionary. A Presbyterian paper in Spanish is edited by the missionary with the help of the young Colombian pastor. This monthly paper, called *El Evangelista Colombiana*, carries Presbyterian news, devotional material, testimonies of Evangelicals, and suggestions for developing the Christian life. It goes to church members and sympathizers in all parts of Colombia.

Bucaramanga is also a center from which missionaries and Colombian evangelists may ride off in car or on horseback to preach in small towns throughout that part of Colombia.

The second largest and the most prosperous city of Colombia is Medellin. Located in a deep and picturesque valley almost a mile above the sea, it is difficult to reach from other points in the interior of Colombia except by plane. In the mountains surrounding the city there are over 500 gold mines which produce more gold than do the mines of any other country in South America. Orchids grow in abundance in and around Medellin and are regularly shipped to New York by plane.

A large percentage of the 170,000 people who live in Medellin are of Jewish ancestry, whose forefathers accepted the Catholic faith in Spain long before the Spaniards began to come to the New World. Most of these people are now fanatically devoted to the Roman Church in spite of their Jewish blood.

Besides the small Presbyterian Church and school in Medellin,



Young leaders in the making

there is a very important Bible Training School located on a farm near the city. To this school come country boys from all parts of Colombia for Bible training. The three-year course is a practical one which prepares the boys for work in the small town and country sections of Colombia. The missionary in charge of the gospel bus often takes the boys with him on his trips into the outlying districts and thus they learn by experience how to preach the gospel to both friendly and hostile crowds.

The Presbyterian Bookstore is also located in Medellin. It carries a stock of over one thousand different titles, mostly in

Spanish. Individuals, schools, and churches order Evangelical books through the missionary in charge of this store.

Flying southeast from Medellin for one hour, or driving over mountain roads for two days in the same direction, the visitor arrives in Bogota, the capital of the country. This famous old city now has a population of over 300,000, and is the center of Colombian culture, education, finance, and transportation.

From the mountains near Bogota come over 75 per cent of the world's emeralds and over half of the world's platinum. There are also famous old salt mines from which the Indians took salt for hundreds of years before the coming of the Spaniards. And a few miles south of Bogota is located the awe-inspiring Tequendama Falls, three times as high as Niagara.

In Bogota, as in most cities of Colombia, the old and the new are ever contrasted: old Spanish-style houses with balconies hanging over narrow streets and modernistic, seven-story office buildings on wide avenues; thick-walled old houses built around *patios* and apartment buildings with electric stoves; peons in sandals and *ruanas* (Colombian ponchos of wool) and business men dressed like New York bankers; ragged orphans begging for pennies in front of attractive theaters which show the latest Hollywood movies; unmarried mothers washing clothes seven days a week to earn bread for their children and modern housing projects for the working man!

The great progress which has been made in Bogota is partly accounted for by the fact that in 1930 a man who had been for a time a student in the Presbyterian Boys' School of Bogota, Dr. Olaya Herrera, was elected President of Colombia. He was the first Liberal president which Colombia had had in many years and he became one of the greatest presidents which Colombia has ever had. He placed an embargo on gold thereby keeping in the country hundreds of thousands of dollars which otherwise would

have gone to the Vatican each year. The embargo also forced absentee landlords to return home from Europe where they had been living in luxury, and caused them to reinvest their wealth within the country.

Although Bogota is but 400 miles north of the equator, the mercury stands at about 65 degrees most of the day, and an overcoat feels comfortable at night. The people, dressed mostly in black, also seem to be cold but they are really quite warm-hearted when one gets to know them.

A new Presbyterian church building was erected in Bogota in 1938 after the old church was sold for over one hundred thousand pesos. The beautiful new building is located just across the street from the new National Library which was completed in 1936 for the four hundredth anniversary of the founding of Bogota. As well as the regular services in Spanish conducted by a Colombian pastor who also teaches in the Presbyterian schools, there is an English Sunday school meeting every Sunday and a preaching service in English every other Sunday.

The two large Presbyterian Schools, the Girls' organized in 1869 and the Boys' in 1890, have grown and prospered in spite of the bitter attacks by the Roman Catholic Church which has had to improve its own schools in order to keep up with the Presbyterians.

At present funds are being raised to replace the antiquated buildings which house the two schools. The present Girls' School building was once a convent, having been built for that purpose in 1595! It is still surrounded on two sides by the walls of the church to which it formerly belonged. The Boys' School faces a large market building while the Girls' School is located but a block from the largest general market in Bogota. Neither location is a very desirable one for a school.

It is hoped that in the near future the two schools can be com-

bined and housed in appropriate buildings. The land for the new school has been bought in a fine residential section of the city near the new National University. A campaign to raise funds for the new school has been started in the United States.

From the schools are recruited the young people who flock to the meeting of the Evangelical Young People's Society which meets every Friday night in the Presbyterian Church, the young people who sing in the choir, and those who are leaders and teachers in the Sunday school.

Many graduates now go on to the University to study law, medicine, or engineering. At present there are five graduates studying at colleges or universities in the United States. Two graduates are studying for the ministry, one of whom has begun his seminary work in Puerto Rico. Three young members of the church, who attended the Girls' School, are now studying nursing, one of them in the Hospital Internacional in Trujillo City, Santo Domingo.

Thirty years ago there was practically no Presbyterian work outside of the three largest cities in Colombia. Today there are growing churches and groups in dozens of small towns, in the large leper colony at Agua de Dios (Water of God) where five thousand lepers are confined, and in the pioneer settlements in the jungles of the Sinu River region.

The Rev. Juan Librero, formerly a nationally known *futbol* (soccer) player and successful teacher in the Boys' School in Barranquilla, now lives with his wife and baby in Cerete in the jungles and spends much of his time riding over jungle trails on horseback to visit the settlements in many of which there are now organized Presbyterian churches. He works in a section of Colombia where the priests are seldom seen and where thousands of people had never even heard the name of Jesus Christ until the arrival of Presbyterian missionaries.

What of the Future?

Are Presbyterian missionaries still needed in Colombia? Can not the Colombian people now be left to solve their own problems? Can not the Colombian leaders of the Presbyterian Church carry on without missionary help?

It is true that Colombia is now awakening from her long slumber. It is true that she has made rapid strides forward economically, materially, and intellectually. But material progress represented by apartment buildings and airplanes is not enough. Nor is the teaching of scientific knowledge alone going to save the world, as the great democracies are now recognizing. Unless spiritual growth keeps pace with material and intellectual progress, a nation is doomed. Material wealth and scientific knowledge must be used to achieve spiritual ends: the conquest of poverty, ignorance, disease, and sin.

While the Roman Catholic Church of Colombia seems to have improved somewhat in the last few years, it can not yet be compared at all favorably with the Roman Catholic Church of the United States. It is not yet ready to assume full spiritual direction of an awakening people. It still spends its energies in the attempt to enrich its own coffers and in vicious verbal attacks on the Protestants rather than in serving and uplifting the people for whom it is responsible.

And there are millions of Colombians who have never been reached at all by the Catholic Church. Some are disgusted by the empty ritual and by the immorality of the priests. Others want to seek for the truth themselves as free men and women but they cannot do so as Catholics. Still others live in the rural areas where the priest passes through but once a year, if that often. To these millions who are not being reached by the Roman Catholic Church, the Presbyterian missionaries make their appeal.

Many tragic sights described by Dr. Speer are still only too

common. One may still see "women with week-old babies folded in their breasts, staggering along under a sack of coffee weighing 150 pounds or a load of merchandise." In Bogota with all its apartments and theaters, there are still hundreds of homeless waifs, half-clothed in filthy rags, begging food, living on the streets, and sleeping in the doorways of public buildings. And yet, when an independent Protestant missionary couple from New Zealand started an orphanage in Medellin, the Catholic Women's Society began a bitter fight against them and went so far as to kidnap some of the children although they had no orphanage in which to place them!

Nor has the Roman Catholic Church ever made any real protest against the Colombians' utter disregard for the Seventh Commandment which brings such tragic consequences. The attitude of the Catholic Church in Colombia is that all men (including priests) have certain primitive emotions which they cannot be expected to control. The Church does not point them to the Living Christ who can save men from sin, instead it promises to open the gates of heaven to all who have the price of admission. But, while the Church finds it easy to promise freedom from punishment in the next world, it has not yet been able to save men from the consequences of sin in this world. And so millions of Colombians continue to suffer, as slaves of sin must suffer, waiting for someone to tell them of the Living Christ who alone can save them from their sins.

In many rural areas people are eager to learn about Jesus Christ but there are not enough missionaries on the field to visit them all, nor is there enough money available to send national evangelists to all who ask for them. When a missionary does pass through these country districts far from the large cities, the people hang on his words and beg him to return and teach them.

Constantly requests come from small towns and villages for



*Ruins of a monastery
near Cartagena*



First Presbyterian Church, Bogota

teachers. But there are far too few teachers to meet the demands. More must be trained. More money must be had to enlarge the small Normal School where a few country girls are receiving training which will enable them to return to help their own people.

While the Presbyterian Church in Colombia now has many devoted national leaders, it is not yet self-supporting either financially or spiritually. Missionaries are still needed to guide the work in the large centers and to carry the gospel to parts of the country which have hardly been touched as yet.

For eighty-five years Presbyterian missionaries have been sowing the seed in Colombia. The fields are now white for the harvest. Thousands are eager for the Good News of Jesus Christ. In years past the Presbyterian Church has let opportunities like this slip by until it was too late. Let us not fail this time. Let us redouble our efforts and work faithfully to spread the light of Jesus Christ so that the darkness of ignorance and sin may be lifted from the minds and hearts of the people of Colombia.

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